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ABSTRACT

Noting that changes in American society and in education over the last 20 years have contributed to the popularity of all-day, every-day kindergarten programs, this brochure discusses the trend toward full-day kindergarten and provides an overview of full-day versus half-day programs. Topics covered include: why the full-day trend, what the research shows, and what makes a full-day program effective. Sources for additional information are included. (HTH)

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# What Should Parents Know About Full-Day Kindergarten?

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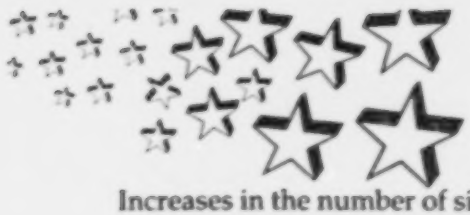

Increases in the number of single-parent and dual-employment households and the fact that most children spend a large part of the day away from home signal significant changes in American family life compared to a generation ago. These changes in American society and in education over the last 20 years have contributed to the popularity of all-day, every-day kindergarten programs in many communities. Studies show that parents favor a full-day program that reduces the number of transitions kindergartners experience in a typical day. Research also suggests that many children benefit academically and socially during the primary years from participation in full-day, compared to half-day, kindergarten programs. This brochure discusses the trend in full-day kindergarten and provides an overview of full-day versus half-day programs.

## Why Is There a Trend Toward Full-Day Kindergarten?

Families who find it difficult to schedule kindergarten and a child care program during the day are especially attracted to a full-day program. Full-day kindergarten is also popular with schools because it eliminates the need to provide buses and crossing guards at midday. In many areas, both public and private preschool programs offer full-day kindergarten. Still, some educators, policymakers, and parents prefer half-day, every-day kindergarten. They argue that a half-day program is less expensive and provides an adequate educational and social experience for young children while orienting them to school, especially if they have attended preschool.

Many districts thus offer both half-day and full-day kindergarten programs when possible, but the trend is clearly in the direction of full-day kindergarten.

## What Does the Research Show?

Research studies confirm that attendance in full-day kindergarten results in academic and social benefits for students, at least in the primary grades. Early studies seemed to offer little reliable evidence one way or the other because they used small samples or unique populations, failed to use rigorous standards, or concentrated almost exclusively on academic outcomes (as opposed to children's attitudes toward school, for example).

Some researchers have found a broad range of effects, including a positive relationship between participation in full-day kindergarten and later school performance. After comparing similar half-day and full-day programs in a statewide longitudinal study, Cryan and others (1992) found that full-day kindergartners exhibited more independent learning, classroom involvement, productivity in work with peers, and reflectiveness than half-day kindergartners. They were also more likely to approach the teacher, and they expressed less withdrawal, anger, shyness, and blaming behavior than half-day kindergartners. In general, children in full-day programs exhibited more positive behaviors than did pupils in half-day or alternate-day programs. Similar results have been found in other studies as well.

## What Makes a Full-Day Program Effective?

Full-day kindergarten allows children and teachers time to explore topics indepth, reduces the ratio of transition time to class time, provides for greater continuity of day-to-day activities, and provides an environment that favors a child-centered, developmentally appropriate approach.

Many experts feel that seat work, worksheets, and early instruction in reading or other academic subjects are largely inappropriate in kindergarten. By contrast, developmentally appropriate, child-centered all-day kindergarten programs:

- Integrate new learning with past experiences through project work and through mixed-ability and mixed-age grouping in an unhurried setting.
- Involve children in firsthand experience and informal interaction with objects, other children, and adults.
- Emphasize language development and appropriate preliteracy experiences.
- Work with parents to share information about their children, build an understanding of parent and teacher roles, emphasize reading to children in school and at home, and set the stage for later parent-teacher partnerships.
- Offer a balance of small group, large group, and individual activities.

- Assess students' progress through close teacher observation and systematic collection and examination of students' work, often using portfolios.

- Develop children's social skills, including conflict resolution strategies.

## Conclusion

Observers of trends in kindergarten scheduling argue that changing the *length* of the kindergarten day is not as important as making sure that *all* kindergartners are provided with developmentally and individually appropriate learning environments, regardless of whether these programs are full day or half day. Recent research supports the effectiveness of full-day kindergarten programs that are developmentally appropriate, indicating that they have academic and behavioral benefits for young children. In full-day programs, less hectic instruction geared to student needs and appropriate assessment of student progress contributes to the effectiveness of the program. While these can also be characteristics of high-quality half-day programs, many children seem to benefit academically and behaviorally from all-day kindergarten. Of course, the length of the school day is only one dimension of the kindergarten experience. Other important issues include the nature of the kindergarten curriculum and the quality of teaching.

## Where Can I Get More Information?

**The following organizations offer information on the topic of kindergarten, as well as other information about early childhood education:**

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign
805 West Pennsylvania Avenue
Urbana, IL 61801–4897
Phone: 217–333–1386
Toll Free: 800–583–4135
Fax: 217–333–3767
E-mail: ericeece@uiuc.edu
Web: http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/ericeece.html
Web: http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin/npinhome.html (National Parent Information Network)

National Association for the Education of Young Children
1509 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036–1426
Toll Free: 800–424–2460
Web: http://www.naeyc.org/naeyc

National Association of State Boards of Education
1012 Cameron Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone: 703–684–4000
E-mail: boards@nasbe.org
Web: http://www.nasbe.org

References identified with ED or EJ are abstracted in the ERIC database. References with EJ are journal articles available at most research libraries. Those with ED are available in microfiche collections at more than 900 locations or can be obtained in paper copy from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service at 1–800–443–ERIC. Call 1–800–LET-ERIC for more details.


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Heaviside, Sheila, and others. 1993. *Public School Kindergarten Teachers' Views on Children's Readiness for School. Contractor Report*. Rockville, MD: Westat Research, Inc. ED 364 332.

Holmes, C. Thomas, and Barbara M. McConnell. 1990. *Full-Day Versus Half-Day Kindergarten: An Experimental Study*. Unpublished paper. ED 369 540.

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Katz, Lilian G. 1995. *Talks With Teachers of Young Children: A Collection*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex. ED 380 232.

Smith, Thomas M., and others. 1994. *The Condition of Education, 1994*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. ED 371 491.

Stipek, Deborah, and others. February 1995. "Effects of Different Instructional Approaches on Young Children's Achievement and Motivation." *Child Development* 66 (1): 209–223. EJ 501 879.

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